

CRITICAL NOTICE

Paradox and Platitude in Wittgenstein's Philosophy

David Pears, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, pp. 152, £ 13.99

ISBN: 978-0-19-955050-0 (paperback)

Reviewed by Derek A. McDougall

This paperback edition of his final book on Wittgenstein, published a year before his death in 2009 at the age of 87, shows David Pears once again surveying ground he had already covered in his first book, *Wittgenstein* (Fontana 1971, revised edition 1985), and in what is often understandably referred to as his truly monumental two-volume study of the development of Wittgenstein's philosophy, *The False Prison* (O.U.P. 1988). This extraordinary book, amounting to almost 600 pages, the first volume of which won an award as an Outstanding Academic Book of 1988-89, was highly praised at the time by a wide range of reviewers, despite the fact that in many ways it is a rambling, exploratory work, so often leaving the reader in the dark about just where it is all leading, a point brought out in what is probably the most critical review it received (Stephen Mulhall's Critical Notice in *Philosophical Investigations*, October 1989). A more favourable and balanced assessment was provided at the same time by Klaus Puhl in *The Philosophical Quarterly* (October 1989).

David Pears's original 1971 book on Wittgenstein is often grouped with Anthony Kenny's *Wittgenstein* (Penguin, 1973, revised Blackwell 2006), and Robert Fogelin's *Wittgenstein* (Routledge 1976, revised 1987), primarily because all three readings are prior, notwithstanding Fogelin's clear anticipation of Kripke, to Saul Kripke's *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Blackwell, 1982), and also to the first volume of the Baker and Hacker Analytical Commentary on the *Philosophical Investigations* from Blackwell in 1980. It would, however, be wrong to conclude from this that since all three readings may be thought to be in some sense 'of their time', they ought to be treated as being of no more than historical interest, because now superseded by more sophisticated and up-to-date 'therapeutic' interpretations. Indeed, one of the more interesting features of Pears's new book lies in the way in which he is beginning to adopt newer perspectives on certain aspects of the two major

facets of the work of Wittgenstein that occupied him in *The False Prison*, the idea of a *private language* - divided in that book into discussions about a *first* private language argument derived from the *Tractatus* and based on the ego, and a *second* argument to be found in *Investigations* §§ 243 to 315 - and the notion of the *ego* itself. These two important themes take up a total of 61 pages of text in two chapters out of the five that the new book contains, and these five chapters collectively occupy a meagre 128 pages.

In his *Wittgenstein*, Pears had identified a private language as one that is necessarily unteachable, a language which on Wittgenstein's view is impossible because it has been separated and uprooted from its circle of teaching links in the normal kinds of contexts in which languages are in fact learnt. Because of this, there would as Pears presents his case, be no possible check 'on the correctness of your impressions' (*Wittgenstein*, 159):

Yet in the circumstances described there would be no difference between your being under the correct impression that you were following a rule and your being under the incorrect impression that you were following a rule, or, at least there would be no detectable difference even for you.

So there would be no effective rules in this so-called 'language' (*Ibid.*)

This means, of course, that a private language could not be a language because in the absence of teaching links 'which can be used as checks' (*Ibid.*), what prevents it from being a language is also what prevents it from being teachable, so that there cannot be a language that is necessarily unable to be taught. In this Chapter 8 on 'Sensations' in which Pears surprisingly makes no references to those passages in the *Investigations* which would normally be quoted in support of his case, *e.g.*, § 258, he elaborates on this general interpretation before coming to the important conclusion in his later 1985 Postscript that this discussion of Wittgenstein's reasons for rejecting a private language now seems to him rather inconclusive (*Ibid.*, 190). It is also worth noting that in this Postscript, Pears makes what would appear to be his first reference to the private linguist's inability to teach himself a language because he 'had no independent, external criteria for his sensation-types', a conclusion which suggests

that in some sense the private linguist has a grasp of something at least potentially meaningful, *viz.*, a sensation-type, even if further down the line he is unable, because of his segregation from certain external criteria of application to which Pears refers, to know what would count as the ability correctly to 're-identify' the *same* sensation-type as distinct from being unable to do so.

This view will come to colour Pears's presentation in *The False Prison*, but of more immediate significance in his Postscript is a point brought to his attention by Barry Stroud in a 1972 Review of his book (*Ibid.*), *viz.*, that he failed to take account of 'the great investigation of rule-following which is at the centre of Wittgenstein's later theory of meaning' (*Ibid.*), a defect that he now wishes to put right. Drawing our attention to Kripke's later 'powerfully argued book', he takes the view that if Kripke's considerations are taken into account, then there can be said to be *two* private language arguments at work in the *Investigations*. One of these is developed before § 243, and, if allowed for, can be used to support Pears's presentation in his book, a presentation which, left unsupported, he now regards as superficial. Taken together, reflection on both of these 'arguments' will allow him to discover 'the deep structure of Wittgenstein's later philosophy' (*Ibid.* 191), because both arguments rely on the 'fundamental premiss that there must be tension between language and world'. Pears makes play with the idea that there must be a friction between language and world which is lost when sensations are detached from the external world. Using the questionable metaphor of 'attaching the target to the gun', or vice versa, the former relevant to mistaken theories of sensation-language and the latter to mistaken theories about descriptive language in general, Pears relates the second idea to the first private language argument before § 243 *pace* Kripke, and the first idea to the second private language argument with which we are mostly familiar. This 'Shooting' metaphor will be found to play a role later on in *The False Prison*, but Pears meanwhile occupies himself in his Postscript amongst other things with demolishing what he refers to as Kripke's paradox that 'when someone applies a word to a thing, the meaning with which he uses the word is not anchored in any contemporary fact about him' (*Ibid.* 193). Arguing that the *Investigations* simply fails to support Kripke's reading, Pears

later in the Chapter attempts to identify the resources that are missing from the world of the private linguist. In addition to the 'agreement in judgements with other people' brought to our attention *via* Kripke, he introduces the idea that a rule-follower in a public world, acting on his own when successful 'could rely on standard objects for the calibration of his reactions' (*Ibid.*, 197 *et seq.*). This is already pointing towards the approach he will adopt in *The False Prison*, where one of the major questions he will come to ask is just what resources, available to the speaker of a public language, the so-called private linguist is supposed to lack, resources which make a private language a philosophical impossibility because they underwrite the ability of the speaker of a public language, as distinct from a private one, to distinguish between being right as against merely seeming to be right.

There are strong grounds for arguing that even to explain one of the major issues at stake in this way will prove disastrous for an understanding of Wittgenstein on private language. The major consideration here is that if the distinction between the public speaker and the private one is so presented, it is already appearing to hinge on purely *de facto* considerations, *as if* the issue could possibly turn on the question whether the private linguist had the right to imagine himself without a body, unable to communicate with others, yet still able to talk to himself inwardly about his sensations. This does not capture the radical conception of privacy which is at the heart of Wittgenstein's thinking. In *The False Prison*, Pears presents Wittgenstein's method in treating the idea of a private language, in terms of his adoption of a quite distinct argumentative strategy:

It would be simplistic to suppose that it is possible to take a late text of Wittgenstein's, cut along the dotted lines, and find that it falls into neatly separated arguments. The structure of his thought is too holistic for that kind of treatment. However, though this is generally true of his later work, his private language argument is something of an exception. It is brief, looks self-contained, and, after it has been cut out of the text of *Philosophical Investigations*, it proves to be memorable and eminently debatable:....(*False Prison*, 328)

Quoting the lack of any criterion of correctness leading to the conclusion that whatever seems right is right, and therefore that one cannot in these circumstances talk about 'right' (§ 258), Pears identifies the central problem as follows:

The topic is the reidentification of sensation-types, and the argument is that a case can be described in which there would be no distinction between applying a word to a sensation-type correctly and applying it incorrectly. (*Ibid.*)

According to Pears, this is intended to capture what lies at the heart of the conception of a language which can be understood only by its speaker as explained in § 243, a language which for Pears 'is completely detached from everything in the physical world': Wittgenstein's point is that this would not qualify as speaking a language because the speaker lacks viable criteria even for understanding what he is doing:

This is a striking argument and one that looks easy to excerpt from the text of *Philosophical Investigations* in which it is developed. Indeed, the argument must have a certain independence, because it is a *reductio ad absurdum*, and it is essential to such arguments that the thesis under attack should be clearly formulated, and that all the premisses should be unequivocally identified....So there can be no doubt that Wittgenstein's private language argument was offered as a self-contained unit, and the question is, 'What would a complete list of its premisses look like?' (*Ibid.*, 329)

In the course of attempting to answer this question, however, Pears importantly repeats his requirement for the proper re-identification of *sensation-types* that can be shown to vitiate his entire treatment as a proper reflection of Wittgenstein's real intentions, because it is then made to look as if the so-called private speaker already has at his disposal something which is a bearer of meaning, *viz.*, a *sensation-type*. The question then becomes whether this item can be successfully re-identified; and what could possibly prevent this re-identification, a perceptive

reader may ask, except some failure of the powers belonging to the private linguist, like his inability to properly *remember* the sensation-type with which he is supposedly already acquainted? Or perhaps the failure lies in the absence of others who could *check* that he has got his identification right? Pears's presentation nevertheless requires that the private language argument has to show, whilst hampered by this obvious disadvantage, that there is nothing that could *count* as speaking a private language:

The argument against the possibility of private reidentification of sensation-types has to make a further, independent point. It must start by allowing, for the sake of argument, that the stage really can be set in the way proposed by the classical phenomenalist: the subject reviews his sensation-types in complete detachment from the external world, and yet the sensations themselves are specified empirically in precisely the way that someone at home in the external world would specify them--'my bodily sensations', 'my visual impressions', etc.

Maybe this is incoherent, but that is not an objection that can be exploited by the private language argument of *Philosophical Investigations*, because it has to show that after the stage has been set in this way nothing that is done on it can possibly count as speaking a language. (*Ibid.*, 330)

Pears goes on to remark that the 'crucial loss inflicted on the would-be speaker of a private language is not too easy to identify in the text of *Philosophical Investigations*' (*Ibid.* 333), at which point he again uses the highly misleading 'Shooting' metaphor which involves a comparison between the predicament of the would-be speaker of a private language and that of a frustrated marksman on a rifle-range, only to drop the metaphor because there are after all important differences between these cases. At this point we are suddenly introduced without warning to the possibility that Wittgenstein took the predicament of the private language speaker to imply that it is 'conceptually impossible for an intelligent wolfchild to set up a private language to record his life in the forest' (*Ibid.* 334). But in asking whether 'the intelligent wolf-child could set

up his language alone, and check the regularity of his use of words on standard physical objects ?' (*Ibid.*), Pears makes no mention of the point that the *kind* of language that would normally be attributable to such a wolf-child in the secondary literature would be one which although invented by a single individual, would nevertheless be assumed to be shareable in principle by others just because it is invented in a public context. Yet this makes it in principle a public language - what is sometimes referred to as a 'contingently private language' - and not a private language that 'only its speaker could understand' in the strict Wittgensteinian sense that at this point is forming the actual subject of Pears's discussion.

It would, however, be beside the point to explore in detail the often long-winded exploration of these and similar points that follows in these succeeding chapters on private language, with the occasionally tortuous argumentation that accompanies it, when the important question is whether Pears's latest presentation manages to overcome the more obvious pitfalls surrounding his treatment of private language in *The False Prison*. The answer is that the account offered in his new book is generally more sophisticated even if at times it does hark back to ways of treating the issues already mentioned. Referring to the title 'Private Language Argument', Pears indicates at the very beginning of his Chapter 3 that he is no longer so disposed as once he would appear to have been to detect a single all-consuming argument of a *reductio ad absurdum* kind:

It can be a misleading name because it seems to imply a single knock-down argument against the possibility of a Private Language but, in fact, both the texts in which the argument is developed present a running battle against Private Language rather than a single engagement. So the search for a single argument may be the result of an oversimplification. (*Paradox & Platitude*, 37).

Furthermore, the texts referred to by Pears now include not only passages succeeding § 243 but also the 'Notes for Lectures on "Private Experience" and "Sense-data 1936" ' in which Wittgenstein in a telling passage reveals the method he is employing to question the idea of a 'private language'.

Having made the general point that if an agent is to play a public language-game, then the possibility of playing the game will depend on an agreement in the reactions of its participants about what they would all choose to describe as 'red', he importantly continues:

But if he speaks to himself, surely this is different. For then he needn't consult other people's reactions and he just gives the name 'red' now to the *same colour* to which he gave it on a previous occasion. But how does he know that it is *the same colour*? Does he also recognize the sameness of colour as what he used to call sameness of colour and so on *ad infinitum*?

(Wittgenstein, as quoted, *Ibid.*)

According to Pears, Wittgenstein's target here is the idea that a person could describe his own sense-impressions in a wholly self-sufficient way that did not rely on their connections with anything in the physical world. But it would be better to say that Wittgenstein is implicitly criticising any thought that the agent could have a concept of *the same colour*, a colour he could 'name' in isolation from the circumstances in which he could be taught, and in which he could learn a public language. If we merely assume that what he understands to be *the same colour* is already a given, so that his impression of *red* is in this way intrinsically meaningful, or that it has its own inherent *representational content*, this will lead to the infinite regress to which he points. Later in *Investigations* § 381, he importantly emphasises this central conclusion again when he asks how he knows that this colour is *red*, and replies that it would be an answer to say that 'I have learnt English'.

The significance of this answer as a guide to Wittgenstein's method is that it points in two directions, firstly to the idea that any thought that our impressions of colour could have their own inherent *representational contents* is already parasitic on our ordinary acquaintance with a public language, and secondly that we do not discover or find out that this is red or that I have a pain, so that first person sensation-ascription is in this way criterionless. It is therefore worth noting that when Wittgenstein comes to discuss in § 288 the features which distinguish the

language of his 'private linguist' from that of an ordinary agent acting in a public setting, he immediately points to this criterionless aspect when he says that the expression of doubt has no place in the public language-game. If, however, we assume what he refers to as the abrogation of this language-game and its inherent connections with the expression of sensation in human behaviour, then it looks as if he might *legitimately* doubt afresh.

By suggesting that what is in a public context *criterionless*, in a private context immediately requires criteria, *viz.*, the correct identification of a sensation as a private *object*, an identification that can go awry and be subject to error, it should not be thought that he is in any way intending to treat this suggestion seriously. He is in effect *defining* the notion of a private *object* in such a way that it can have no application to our ordinary talk about our sensations, whilst at the same time he is hinting that at least one way in which philosophers *can* be misled into thinking of their 'impressions of colour' as 'private' and 'unique to *them*' is to think of them as *objects* in this way. But this is hardly a *reductio ad absurdum* which serves to undermine Pears's conception of the historical phenomenalist. It is rather a 'reminder' of how our ordinary sensation language, if looked at dispassionately, can be understood to function in practice; and *if* this account of its ordinary function should in the process be thought to have any further historical implications for 'Cartesianism' or 'phenomenalism' then so be it. It is primarily a new and enlightening way of looking at things.

By contrast, Pears's argumentative approach is tied to the idea that 'a colour word like "blue" could not be given a stable meaning by a would-be private linguist, whose only resource would be his visual impressions of blue without any regular connections with blue physical objects' (*Ibid.*, 44), with the consequence that reliance on the remembered similarity of a sequence of visual impressions would be quite insufficient for Pears's Wittgenstein to establish a proper idea of 'linguistic regularity'. Whilst there would hardly seem to be any basis for *this* interpretation in the related texts, Pears does adopt a Wittgensteinian perspective when he argues that traditional philosophers who insist that they *can* recognise their recurring *pre-linguistic* sense-impressions as sense-impressions of the *same* colour are ignoring Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument:

Philosophers who reject the argument say, 'I am sure that I could recognize my sense-impressions even if they were not connected in any way with the physical world'. Maybe so. But that is because they are imagining themselves already trained in this world to use vocabulary for exteroceptive perceptual impressions and taking it with them into another world, where there would be no established connections between sense-impressions and physical objects. But can they also imagine living *their whole lives* in the world that lacked these connections and still setting up a language for reporting their sense-impressions? That really would be a way of challenging Wittgenstein's argument (*Ibid.*, 44 et seq.)

But it would be nothing of the kind, since the possibility of *imagining* this is there from the beginning. Whilst this passage is on the right lines, it does not recognise the *methodological* rather than *argumentative* strategy that Wittgenstein employs. He does not say that we cannot *imagine* inventing a language to talk of sensations which have an inherent *representational content*. Indeed, it is precisely because we are tempted all too easily to believe that our ability to do so is of philosophical relevance, that he questions what it is that we think we are doing. His challenge rests on his invitation to look at things in a new and enlightening way, and whilst Pears is evidently moving in this direction, he is still wedded to the idea that Wittgenstein is presenting an *argument*, repeated later in the chapter (*Ibid.*, 55), against the idea 'that meaning could be preserved in a language that had severed all its connections with the physical world in order to achieve privacy. But how would it be preserved? By unchecked memory?' But we ought rather to say that Wittgenstein turns the investigation around by reminding us of the circumstances in which languages are actually learnt, not because this *must* be so, but in order to loosen the hold of the misleading pictures that are so often determining the course of the investigation. One of these *pictures* does indeed portray a 'private linguist' blissfully isolated from the public world, inventing names for sensations which because of their distinctive 'qualitative feels'

which provide us with the *representational contents* enabling us to 'identify and re-identify them', encourages the idea that this retains its sense when isolated from all the ordinary surrounding circumstances in which languages are in fact taught and learnt.

Wittgenstein is in effect saying that what the philosopher is proposing is completely idle. Rather than think of his method as a way of showing that the philosopher who believes that he can introduce a private language 'to talk about his sensations' is thinking of introducing something which can be shown demonstratively to be radically incoherent, it is often better to see him as saying that if we look at how our ordinary sensation language functions, then what the philosopher is imagining, although it may very well, and indeed almost inevitably must have some tenuous connection with features of our ordinary first person sensation-ascription in a public context, is actually only a dream about how our language works, a fantasy, a proposal that is doing no real work.

In some respects this assessment is closer to that of Barry Stroud in his 'Private Objects, Physical Objects, and Ostension', a paper originally intended as a review of certain aspects of *The False Prison* (in *Meaning, Understanding, and Practice Philosophical Essays* O.U.P., 2002), a paper to which Pears objects on grounds which fail to adequately capture the point that Stroud is making; and whilst Stroud is probably unduly negative in his general assessment of Wittgenstein's intentions, he comes closer to capturing the method that Wittgenstein is adopting in the relevant sections. Pears, on the other hand, continues to see Wittgenstein adopting a wholly argumentative strategy:

The general idea is clear enough: a single, exemplary application of a word is not enough to fix the way in which the technique of applying it is to be developed. But why should the would-be private linguist be restricted to a single application of the word ?.....What is there to prevent him from saying 'The ostensive definition is only the first step in fixing the meaning of "S". It is not complete in itself and needs to be supplemented by my further applications of the word?' That is what he would say if he coined a new word in a public language. So what stops him saying it about

a new word in a private language ? If a criticism of the Private Language hypothesis is going to be based on the inscrutability of isolated ostensive definitions, this question must be answered. There ought to be some special feature of an ostensive definition of a word in a Private Language that blocks this move. But what could it be ? (*Ibid.*, 46 *et seq.*)

Once again, Pears's presentation has all the hallmarks of basing the distinction between the public language and the private one on purely *de facto* considerations, as if the issues at stake turned on thinking of the consequences which might accrue for a person presently using a first-person sensation language in a public context, who suddenly imagines himself without a body, and totally isolated from other embodied individuals. This outlook is probably what lies behind a claim that Pears espouses more than once in this chapter, that the general drift of the criticisms Wittgenstein makes of a Private Language are clear enough, although the same cannot be said for the details. It may also lie behind the difficulties he discovers in confronting the point of § 270, and whilst Pears is not alone in finding the manometer example problematic, what he succeeds in providing in his attempt to resolve the puzzle it is often thought to present, becomes so convoluted that it invites its reader to return to Wittgenstein's text to capture what he is *really* saying. Pears's difficulties revolve around Wittgenstein's claim that following the useful result of being able to say that his blood-pressure is rising without using any apparatus, Wittgenstein puzzlingly states that it then seems indifferent whether he has recognised the sensation *right* or not, and that identifying it wrong does not matter in the least:

This is a paradoxical thing to say, given that it is through my sensation that I recognize that my blood-pressure is rising. His point must be, that then, is the way to put it, and that it is a mistake to say that I recognize the property of the sensation. For that suggests that my sensation is an object with a property recognizable independently of this particular connection with the

physical world. For example, it might have been like the feeling of tension behind the forehead (not quite a headache) that some people get when a thunderstorm is approaching. But his point is that it is not like that. For when I discover through sensation that my blood-pressure is rising, my sensation does not already have an independently recognizable phenomenal property. Its only property is the one whose discovery is described in this text, namely, the property of indicating a rise in my blood-pressure. (*Ibid.*, 57)

We are then told that it is not at all surprising why one cannot in the manometer case provide a phenomenal description of the 'strange feeling' which accompanies the correlation of its occurrence with the observed rise in blood-pressure, when it is this very rise in pressure that is actually used in the course of describing the 'nature' of what one feels. Pears remarks that this topic, 'the emergence of descriptions of sensations', is shrouded in fog.

It would be difficult to discover a clearer example of what can happen when, because he misconstrues Wittgenstein's intentions, a philosopher can be forced into making bizarre claims, in this case about a 'feeling' which does *not* have an independently recognisable phenomenal property, when the fog instantly disperses on realising that Wittgenstein's initial reference to having a particular sensation is *already* to having a sensation of a particular *kind*. So every time he feels a sharp pain in his elbow, for example, he finds that his blood-pressure rises, and provided that the correlation is experimentally confirmed, he can in the future go on to correctly claim that his blood-pressure is rising without using any apparatus. It is indifferent whether he *recognises* the sensation *right* or not, only because in this case, as distinct from that envisaged in § 258 (*Cf.* § 288), there is no question of *recognising* the sharp pain in his elbow as 'right or wrong' at all, for his correctly claiming in the first person that he has such a pain is not dependent on the operation of criteria. That could be true only on the misleading private-object model that is actually being undermined here through the way in which Wittgenstein

constructs the manometer example in conformity with his usual methodological strategy.

What has misled a number of interpreters of § 270, including Pears, is the clear tendency to misread the apparent indifference about *recognising* the sensation right or not *as* a way of saying that it does not matter what *kind* of sensation is correlated with the manometer reading, since that suggestion, as Pears understandably remarks, would indeed arouse our puzzlement. It would lead us to ask what work the correlation is supposed to be doing if it is after all irrelevant *what* particular *kind* of sensation allows us to conclude that our blood-pressure is rising without using any kind of apparatus.

The difficulties here are compounded by the fact that when in § 270 Wittgenstein imagines a use for the sign 'S' in his diary, a sign that previously in § 258 had *no* use, we may be inclined to wonder how a sign *initially* intended to have a spurious application only on the misleading private-object model, can suddenly and without warning be envisaged to have a genuine use after all. It is better therefore to think of § 270 as a new start, in which 'S' is now imagined from the beginning of the passage to have a proper use to apply to a sensation of a particular *kind*. (1)

Solipsism as a philosophical thesis plays little or no role in Pears's *Wittgenstein*, being consigned to a fairly brief mention in pages 75-76 and in 89-90, and it is only in his Postscript (*Ibid.*, 185) that he comes to consider the role that it plays in the *Tractatus*. The 'truth' that there is in solipsism he attempts to capture in the following account:

All experience is had from a point of view, which is not represented in the experience itself, but is, as it were, its inner limit. Its outer limit is equally elusive, like the boundary of the visual field, beyond which there is nothing else on the same level. (*Ibid.*)

Pears states that Wittgenstein takes up this idea again after his return to philosophy in 1929, applying it to the language 'in which we exchange reports on our sensations' and begins by identifying two problems, 'one about the objects in a person's field of consciousness and the

other about the inner subject or ego'. Claiming that the solution to the problem of the ego is actually implicit in the *Tractatus* but is actually worked out in detail in his 'early middle period', Pears locates it in the vanishing of the ego without our feeling any sense of loss: because there is no inner owner to point towards, one may as well drop any reference to 'I' and say only that 'there is pain'. Pears sums up his general position in his Postscript in the following words:

When the solipsist points backwards in the direction of his ego or points forward at his sensation-types, his gestures, or, to be more accurate, his imagined gestures will be empty unless they are associated with viable criteria of identity. (*Ibid.*, 188)

The remainder of the Postscript, as already indicated, draws a distinction between two private language arguments, one deriving from Kripke and pre-*Investigations* § 243, and the other familiar argument deriving from § 243 onwards through § 258. When one turns to *The False Prison*, however, where two separate 'private language arguments' are also identified, the first argument relates instead to the *Tractatus* and has nothing to do with a Kripkean reading of *Investigations* passages surrounding § 201:

For it is related to the argument of the *Tractatus*, that if ego-based solipsism is not empty it is incoherent, in exactly the way in which the later private language argument of *Philosophical Investigations* is related to the argument that classical phenomenalism with an empirically identified base-line is incoherent. In both cases incoherence is the first charge against the theory to be rejected. In both cases the theorist tries to meet this charge by claiming that when he retreats into his private world, he can take with him the linguistic equipment required for reproducing in that world the performances of speakers in the public world. (*False Prison*, 319)

However, according to Pears's Wittgenstein, the would-be solipsistic theorist exaggerates

the resources that he is able to retain in his retreat from the public world. Pears argues that the point of the first private language argument is that he would lose discriminating reference to individuals, whilst the point of the second as already discussed in detail, is that he would lose discriminating reference to his sensation-types.

However, if Wittgenstein does have anything to say against the solipsist from the perspective of the *Philosophical Investigations*, it would be, not that in his seeming *de facto* retreat from the public world to a private world of his own he is quite unable to retain the resources available 'only' in that world - although we can of course imagine or fantasise about being disembodied selves *because* of a prior acquaintance with a public world - but that he is inclined to make remarks regarding, for example, his 'sense-data', in contexts in which they have no clear application because they have become segregated from the ordinary surrounding circumstances in which they could have any proper sense. This point is captured in the famous *Blue Book* passage where the solipsist's claim that 'This is what's really seen' (71) becomes empty because there is nothing that it excludes, in the sense that this is ordinarily a claim one might make in circumstances in which it could be shown to be mistaken. *Investigations* §§ 398 - 401 is also worth considering in this respect.

Whatever one may think about Pears's first private language argument based on the ego of the *Tractatus*, it has nothing to do with another argument that Cora Diamond discovers in her paper 'Does Bismarck Have a Beetle in His Box?' (*The New Wittgenstein* ed. Crary, Read, Routledge: London, 2000) where she argues perceptively that Wittgenstein adopts the anti-Russellian view that our ordinary language and thought concerning 'other minds' is alright insofar as it is not to be construed as a means of indirectly pointing towards items (Bismarck's private sensations) which are in principle beyond our ken. It is in *this* sense that what solipsism *means* to say is correct, a point which in the later philosophy will develop into the idea that in raising a problem about other minds when doing philosophy, we are revealing our adherence to a misleading *picture* of 'other minds' which is incidental to the *practice* of speaking about the sensations of ourselves and of others.

In his new book, Pears uses his final chapter on the Ego to talk about two important

paradoxes, one relating to the earlier philosophy and one relating to the later. Pears takes it that one of the consequences Wittgenstein appears to extract from his earlier treatment of solipsism is that 'I' is not a referential expression, for Pears a highly paradoxical claim given that a person's name is clearly used to refer to him, with the consequence that the personal pronoun 'I' must surely be used to refer to him as well. This second paradox, which Pears finds expressed in *The Blue Book*, pages 66-67, and quotes more than once (*Ibid.*, 97, 116 and 119), although he surprisingly does not mention its recurrence in *Investigations* §§ 404 - 410, he resolutely refuses to see resolved in any of the passages in which Wittgenstein discusses his reasons for isolating and treating separately first person present tense psychological utterances (2).

Yet Wittgenstein makes it clear in the extensive passage from *The Blue Book* that he is pointing to a difference between 'I have a broken arm' and 'I have a toothache': in the former the possibility of error is allowed for, and for this reason there is the recognition of a person, whereas in the latter it makes no sense to ask whether you are certain whether it is *you* as distinct from someone else who has toothache, so that the question of *recognising* anyone does not arise. Insofar as it is true that 'I have toothache' does not then allow for the possibility of mistaking someone else for me, it is not a statement *about* a particular person, and for that reason the occurrence of 'I' in these and similar cases is *not* referential. This does not of course imply that in talking about myself whether or not I am making a present tense psychological statement, I am *not* making a statement *about* someone who exists in a spatio-temporal world amongst other persons, someone to whom for this reason I may in a broad sense be said to be referring; and this platitudinous reflection may to some degree lie behind Pears's refusal to go along with Wittgenstein's reasons for saying that in certain specific instances 'I' is not a referential expression. 'Damn it all', says Pears, in evident frustration, 'it is me, by the usual criteria of personal identity' (*Ibid.*, 128).

The first paradox centred on the Ego, Pears finds expressed in *Tractatus* 5.6 - 5.62, for he would not expect solipsism to be expressing any kind of truth, and certainly not one

about language. As Pears puts it, 'the truth of "I alone exist" would exclude the possibility of finding any exclusive evidence for its truth' (*Ibid.*, 96). It would on Pears's assessment be wrong, however, to see Wittgenstein's adoption of an idea derived from Schopenhauer - that a person's ego does not figure amongst the objects in his world - as a way of saying that the ego is a myth, since, according to *Tractatus* 5.641, 'the world is my world', and this allows the self to enter into philosophy in a non-psychological way. 'The world and life are one' (5.621), and this for Pears means that it is 'therefore impossible to drive a wedge between our general conception of the world and the way things really are in the world'. Pears sees this as a leading idea of Wittgenstein's later philosophy, an idea captured in the thought that human beings are agents acting in the world, and who are more than passive receptors of information. According to Pears, this idea is already developing in his early treatment of solipsism, and is easier to see expressed in the *Notebooks* rather than in its finished form in the *Tractatus*. Pears asks what happens in the later philosophy to the insight for which Wittgenstein commended the solipsist:

Apparently two transformations occurred. First, the solitary case, myself, was replaced by the community, ourselves, the speakers of a common language. Second, the project of drawing a single boundary around the whole of factual knowledge was abandoned and the heir to that project was a piecemeal investigation of the bounds of sense reinforced by a therapeutic treatment of different attempts to trespass beyond them. (*Ibid.*, 109)

Pears's rather speculative approach in these pages sees Wittgenstein developing ideas in *The Blue Book* that take his discussion of solipsism much further than in the *Tractatus*. This provides a stronger argument than Hume's mere assertion that he did not have an inner impression of the self; but also, and more importantly, it leads to thoughts about the personal pronoun 'I' as a non-referential expression, and to connections with Wittgenstein's treatment

of Private Language, which have already been discussed.

Pears's treatment of 'Logical Necessity' in Chapter 4 of his new book is generally more perspicuous than that provided in the 'Necessity' Chapter 7 of his *Wittgenstein*, and covers the ground in greater detail and with a wealth of quotations compared to the paucity of references in the earlier book. However, the general theme he takes up is well captured in a passage from *Wittgenstein*:

But what is the meaning of the suggestion that the truths of logic and mathematics have an anthropocentric basis ? As soon as we try to understand its meaning we find ourselves in a world of vertiginous paradox. Does it really mean that logic and arithmetic developed out of certain choices made by the human race ? If so, what could the other options possibly have been ? (*Ibid.*, 135)

His treatment is coloured throughout by the thought that the 'Vestigial Realism' of the *Tractatus* was later replaced by a 'Voluntarism and Conventionalism', and that Wittgenstein's criticism of the former is ultimately based on the conclusion that logical necessities cannot be based on contingencies in the world, and that it was a mistake to express in the same language, both the necessary truth and the contingent facts on which it was supposed to depend' (*Paradox and Platitude*, 85). Pears sums up the feelings experienced by many commentators when discussing Wittgenstein's ideas about necessity:

It is extraordinarily difficult to keep a level head when one tries to answer the question whether Wittgenstein's later account of logical necessity is acceptable. We reflect that a logically valid argument has to move on the track of a real necessity, and, because we are dazzled by the way in which singular factual propositions achieve truth, we find it overwhelmingly

natural to say that logically necessary propositions have to correspond to real necessities. We think that if there were no real necessities to which logically necessary propositions could correspond, they could only be based on Humpty Dumpty's non-rational Voluntarism. (*Ibid.*, 83)

To the question whether Wittgenstein bases agreement in judgements and rational procedures, on historical anthropology or on logical analysis, Pears answers *neither*, because there is a continual and mainly voluntary conformity in human life to the rules attendant upon speaking a language, a language which allows for all manner of variation in what is effectively a creative exploration of future possibilities, carrying children, as he puts it, on more distant flights (*Ibid.*, 92). Pears is not going to find it easy to capture the conclusions towards which he is being driven here whilst remaining within the realm of the purely prosaic :

The plain truth of the matter is that the innovative expansions of language that Wittgenstein discusses in his treatment of logical necessity all start within language. They start with a well-confirmed general statement which almost asks to be guaranteed by definition, or with the premisses of a proof in logic in which the conclusion can be foreseen before it is drawn. So the innovation is a step that is made almost inevitable by the momentum of the thought behind it, and not by the intrinsic attractiveness of real possibilities waiting for recognition in the limbo of possible possibilities (*Ibid.*, 95)

In 'Linguistic Regularity', Pears pays attention to the notion of rule-following that he later came to realise *via* Barry Stroud's review that he had neglected in his earlier work. Pears begins his presentation by asking in general terms what holds together the things to which a general word applies, and sees Wittgenstein's treatment of rule-following as an implicit rejection of historical Realism and Nominalism *because* these theories are empty: they cannot

serve to independently identify or provide an 'explanation' for those universals or specific similarities invoked (*Ibid.*, 17). These theories are 'failed mimics of science', a point on which he elaborates by claiming, rather misleadingly, that there is nevertheless a sense in which we might be said to 'explain' the extensions of our colour words in scientific terms by pointing to the physiology of our colour vision. Remarking that we would expect Wittgenstein's account of 'linguistic regularity' or 'rule-following' to be 'pithy and memorable', Pears notes only that it has proved difficult for commentators to provide any consensus on what his answer might be.

Pears's overall survey of those case histories cited by Wittgenstein in which, for example, the pupil's capacity to learn may come to an end, 'wildly improbable' though they may be in practice, and of Saul Kripke's treatment of the surrounding issues in his 'brilliant monograph', is in general clear, although Pears expresses the issues at stake in his own particular idiom. He sees *Investigations* §§ 198 - 202 as an argument on Wittgenstein's part for the claim that 'theories of meaning that merely offer verbal analyses of particular words leave the whole canopy of language "hanging in the air", unattached to anything in our lives' (*Ibid.*, 22). Pears's answer on behalf of Wittgenstein is to 'tie it down, and that is done in real life by actually applying words to things and in philosophy by giving a general account of the practice of applying words to things', an account which is not driven by the dogmatic assumptions of the *Tractatus*.

Pears, then, sees Wittgenstein's treatment of rule-following as a way of replacing a 'Platonic fixity of meaning' with the suggestion that the 'ultimate repositories of meaning' lie in linguistic techniques. The key to understanding Wittgenstein's later treatment of meaning is captured in the idea that man is the measure of all things. If the early Picture Theory automatically conferred a definite sense on a sentence without any contributions from the speakers who use it, Wittgenstein in his rule-following considerations rejects this idea, so that § 201 is a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea that a theory of meaning is like the theory of any other human activity and can be expressed in words; for such a theory would necessarily remain incomplete. Pears sees what he refers to as 'the paradox of investigation-dependence' following from the thought that meaning is

dependent on a continuing investigation of his future reactions in applying a word; yet if a word does not already take its past meaning into the future this formulation is unintelligible. The very distinction between continuing a practice and modifying it will have collapsed, and with it the concept of linguistic regularity.

Pears allies himself with many other commentators in reaching the conclusion, therefore, that, as he puts it, § 201 does not state that the relation between language and the world in itself presents a paradox, but that it does so only when this relation is interpreted in a particular way. Instead of adopting Kripke's conclusion that 'the relation between language and the world is irremediably precarious', Pears argues that it looks precarious only if we omit 'the essential contribution to linguistic regularity that is made by our common human nature' (*Ibid.*, 27-28). This, for Pears, is the central pillar of Wittgenstein's (later) philosophy of language. He adds, however, that this contribution of human nature is not easy to prove, because 'its operation is hidden behind the more obvious pressure to conform to the linguistic community's requirement that we should agree in our judgements', a pressure that would never have produced conformity without a common human nature to support it. Furthermore, any detailed argument for this point would take us out of philosophy and into science.

If this seems at the very least unclear, part of the reason is that if human nature does have a role to play in the later philosophy, it is as a methodological principle and not as a verifiable hypothesis. Pears confirms his scientific orientation when he adds that what is required here is 'a detailed account of our endowment and needs that will explain why we sort things in the way that we do', and this inevitably raises his question whether there can be a clear demarcation in this area between philosophy and science.

Merely to add that 'Wittgenstein not surprisingly does not explore this frontier' may on Pears's part seem disingenuous, when it is perfectly plain that a scientific account of human endowment is not his concern. Pears returns his reader to the strictly philosophical fold when he remarks that Wittgenstein provides a 'minimalist' account of rule-following which he thinks that

philosophers embellish when they introduce ‘the picture of an irresistible external force exerted by something completely independent of our nature’. The rest of the chapter is occupied with a further exploration of this and surrounding issues, issues involving our tendency to ‘treat the contents of our own minds as symbols of their own future development’. What this means will give rise to questions which Pears understandably claims are not going to be easy to answer.

Pears continues, in fact, by drawing our attention to those passages in which Wittgenstein emphasises that we obey the rule *blindly* (§ 219), or that we see the series in just *one* way (§ 228), that we only need to add ‘and so on’ in order reach infinity (§ 229), that the line intimates the way to go on (§ 230) or that the rule seems to produce all its consequences in advance if the agent draws them *as a matter of course* (§ 238). Yet these accounts are only reflections that the constraint involved, as Pears puts it, comes from within human nature, so that talk about lines being followed through the whole of space or to infinity are symbolic dramatisations of the ordinary experience of continuing a mathematical series or continuing the application of a word.

Similarly, the idea of ‘grasping the use of a word in a flash’ is not something for which we have a model, since the misunderstanding it can come to illustrate when treated as a ‘philosophical superlative’ is described by Pears as a way of treating future performance ‘as if it were already actualized in the present state of the person’s mind’ (*Ibid.*, 32). We tend to ‘externalize’ our feelings in these cases almost as a matter of course, leading to a tendency to adopt a traditional theory like Realism or Nominalism (*Ibid.*, 29). This tendency to ‘externalize’ certain features of our ordinary practices rests on a misunderstanding of the claim that we ‘can grasp the whole use of a word in a flash’, a misunderstanding that Pears expresses a couple of pages earlier on in the thought that future applications of a word have in some way already been made and are already stored ‘in our minds’ for future use. (*Ibid.*, 30). Pears expands this point in his own way:

Second, we treat what really is in the mind as a symbol of the mind’s own future action, and so we conflate the two kinds of necessity, logical and nomological, and imagine that we can

deduce this part of our future with a necessity that combines the strength of logical necessity with the informativeness of nomological necessity (*Ibid.*, 30)

But, of course, there can be no such thing. As Pears puts it, 'if you choose the benefit of logical necessity you lose the benefit of nomological necessity' (*Ibid.*, 33), a dilemma which Pears understands to be the key to Wittgenstein's treatment of logical necessity as discussed in his fourth chapter.

The 16 pages which comprise the first chapter of the book on 'The Pictorial Character of Language' provide an overview of the emergence of the Picture Theory in the early phase of Wittgenstein's philosophy, and Pears provides an illustration which vividly depicts the notion that underlies the Picture Theory as he understands it`:

The general idea developed in the theory is that a verbal description of a scene is like the surface of a pointillist painting: each dot stands for a particular point in space and the colour of the dot conveys a message about that point, and thus the whole painting is a complicated report of the actual scene. So Seurat's work 'La Grand Jette' is like a complex verbal description of what he saw on that summer's day, and, if we take the next step, a verbal description is itself another kind of picture (*Ibid.*, 1)

Characteristically finding the *Notebooks 1914 - 1916* to be clearer than the *Tractatus* itself, Pears takes it that Wittgenstein simply assumes that the world is the dominant partner in its relations with language. However, to say, for example, that the word 'blue' is correlated with the colour blue is too like failing to explain anything that it raises the question why Realism has been so persistent in the history of ideas. As Pears puts it, one 'cannot explain the meaning of the word "mauve" by saying that it means the colour "mauve" because that

would be using the correlation that it was supposed to explain instead of giving an independent identification of the colour' (*Ibid.*, 4). Consequently, if we cannot *say* that a particular name *means* a particular object but only *show* that it does by applying it to that object, then it may come to seem that what is shown is intended to be unintelligible instead of merely lacking factual sense. But here Pears places himself firmly in the camp of the traditionalists: there is no admission on Wittgenstein's part that there is a flaw that vitiates the 'beautiful theory' that in his view serves as the foundation for the whole system of the *Tractatus*. This is backed by historical evidence that there is no 'tongue in cheek' use of the notion of *showing* throughout the period.

However, the uncompromising Realism that Pears finds expressed in the *Notebooks* does not come over quite so clearly in the more oracular text of the *Tractatus*, and Pears attempts to clarify the issue whilst drawing our attention to the source of the Picture Theory in a break with Russell over his theories of judgement, finding the fundamental difference between them to lie in the 'diffuse' Realism of Russell as opposed to Wittgenstein's 'narrowly focussed' version. Pears does not think that the fate of the Picture Theory in the later writings is at all clear, and he suspects that it is superseded both by the realisation that isolated ostensive definitions are never enough to fix the meanings of words, and by the anthropological thrust of the later tendency to locate meaning in the linguistic techniques of actual speakers. Whilst such potted explanations may in themselves seem of little value, Pears is pointing here to the subjects of his remaining chapters which extrapolate on these major changes in the direction of Wittgenstein's philosophy.

David Pears's new book is therefore a fitting tribute to someone who did spend a large proportion of his philosophical career in developing his understanding of Wittgenstein's ideas, though his works on Russell and Hume are also fairly well known. His idiosyncratic reading will inevitably play an important role by enabling us to approach more closely the 'real' Wittgenstein in whom we mostly still believe, even if *this* individual seems reluctant to emerge from the shadows cast by the increasing number of competing interpretations to which his thinking has become subjected.

ENDNOTES

- (1) This reading of § 270 is very much in keeping with that of Peter Hacker in *Wittgenstein Meaning and Mind*, Volume 3, Part II Exegesis, of *An Analytical Commentary on the Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 77, whose emphasis is on the 'no question of recognition rightly or wrongly' in the public as opposed to the private case. Hacker nevertheless describes his reading as 'controversial' (*Ibid.*, 79) which, given the prevalence of alternatives like Pears's own in the literature, is not as surprising a description as may at first appear.
- (2) A reading echoed by John Canfield in 'Back to the Rough Ground: Wittgenstein and Ordinary Language' in *Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy Essays for P.M.S. Hacker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 117, with his emphasis on the conditions surrounding paradigmatic cases of referring which this use of 'I' fails to meet. Daniele Moyal-Sharrock also agrees given her claim that (in these cases) the use of 'I' is not descriptive but expressive (Review of *Paradox & Platitude* in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, January 2008).

As do most philosophers, Derek McDougall fondly remembers the publication of his very first paper. This was in MIND in 1972. He has, however, continued to worry whether Gilbert Ryle's comment that "the matter is stated well and almost interestingly" referred more to the quality of its treatment rather than to Ryle's aversion to the nature of its subject (religious belief). Other papers have appeared in organs including PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH and PHILOSOPHIA. His latest, on Wittgenstein, appears in the 2008 edition of JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH, with a further in PHILOSOPHICAL INVESTIGATIONS January 2010.